

**THE
STAGE**

THE

High Road to Hell

[Price 1s. 6d.]

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THE
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High Road to Hell;

BEING AN
ESSAY
ON THE
PERNICIOUS NATURE
OF

Theatrical Entertainments;

Shewing them to be at once inconsistent with
Religion, and subversive of Morality.

WITH

Strictures on the vicious and dissolute Characters of
the most eminent Performers of both Sexes.

The Whole enforced and supported by the best Authorities,
both Ancient and Modern.

*Hac fonte derivata clades in patriam populumque
fluxit.* HOR.

LONDON:

Printed for W. NICOLL, in St. Paul's Church-yard;
J. WILLIAMS, rect.

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Has found favour in the eyes of the most judicious and discerning

LONDON:

Printed for W. Nicol, in St. Paul's Church-yard; and J. Williams, in Pall-mall.

TO
The Rev. Mr. MADAN.

S I R,

TO whom can I more properly
dedicate a treatise against the
delusions of worldly refinement, and
those corruptions which in populous
cities pass for the greatest improve-
ments of taste, and the most extra-
ordinary efforts of genius, than to
one whose labours in God's vineyard
shew him to have nothing at heart
but "the one thing needful."

Yours

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DEDICATION.

I am sensible, Reverend Sir, that a man of your learning must well know that all arts are proofs of the degeneracy of the human species; for if man had not, by the fall, and its fatal consequences, forfeited his first exalted condition, he would never have occasion for invention to supply his wants, or education to remedy the imbecility of his nature. We find that even the Heathens themselves had an idea of man's first glorious state, and of his decline from it. Plato tells us, that man at the creation had a glorious body, impervious to wounds, and secure from the attacks of disease; that he had wings, and could fly; and that his mind was, by intuition, supplied with all that knowledge which mortals, in their present degenerate state, must

DEDICATION.

must laboriously acquire by study, and rise to by progression, from the first rude essay of a workman, to the skill of the artist; and from that to the last improvement of human learning, to science itself.

But if art in general is a proof of the weakness and corruption of our nature, theatrical art must surely be allowed to be the height and summit of all corruption, since the stage shews man to man; that is, shews a fallen creature to himself, and, by laying before him all the various abuses to which the depravity of his nature has subjected him, renders him still more prone to sin, and even incites him to repeat those irregularities, which knowledge, if rightly understood, should enable him to conquer

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conquer and suppress. There is not a more just observation amongst those divine maxims the proverbs of Solomon, than the following, “ The heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked, who can know it ? ” The theatre then, as it is but a representation of what passes in the heart of man, cannot be considered by any sober christian but as a sink of impurity ; inasmuch as by representing all the various agitations of passion, it excites, instead of suppressing them ; and, whilst it seems to point to the danger of sin, the same steers to the allurements of vice, and conducts to the rocks of perdition.

It may be proved, Reverend Sir, out of the mouths of dramatic authors themselves, that the theatre is
the

DEDICATION.

the result of the corruption of the human heart ; and that though it has been falsely represented by a superficial French author, as the school of the world, it is, as that excellent prelate, Dr. Tillotson, has justly observed, the school of the devil himself. The passage I mean is as follows :

*Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasm, or a hideous dream ;
The genius, and the mortal instruments
Are then in council ; and the whole state of
man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.*

These words, though wrote to represent the state of mind of a conspirator, properly represent the state of

DEDICATION.

of mind of every man that attends at a theatrical exhibition ; for the intention there, both of the author and the actor, is to set all the springs of the soul in motion, to irritate the passions, and to give a shape and body to every evil suggestion of the human breast.

A gentleman so well acquainted with the sacred oracles as you are, need not be informed that the exhibitions of the theatre were unknown to the Jews, as well as to the primitive Christians ; and that the first invention of them, after the christian æra, was owing to the declining credit of the church ; for as soon as the word of God was inattentively listened to at the assemblies of the faithful, Satan started up, in the shape
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of an hypocrite, and called the servants of the true God to the theatre of darkness, and seduced them from the true place of worship, to the Devil's Masquerade.

Thus, Sir, I have endeavoured to set before you the fatal effects of those theatrical amusements, which, in the opinion of a great many amongst us, preclude the church, and render the preaching of God's ministers unnecessary. I hope, however, as you are a minister of the gospel, you will favourably accept of this Essay, which, though the work of a layman, was intended by the author to promote Christianity, and pull down that grand enemy of it, the Stage. I am, Rev. Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

The AUTHOR.

DEDICATION.

of an hypocrite, and called the servants of the true God to the service of darkness, and reduced them from the true place of worship, to the Devil's marketplace.

Thus, Sir, I have endeavoured to set before you the fatal effects of those theatrical representations, which in the opinion of a great many amongst us, pervade the church, and render the preaching of God's ministers unprofitable. I hope, however, as you are a minister of the Gospel, you will favourably accept of this Essay, which, though the work of a layman, was intended by the author to promote Christianity, and pull down that grand enemy of it, the Stage. I am, Sir, your

Your most obedient humble servant

The Author.

T H E
S T A G E

T H E
High Road to Hell.

I AM well aware that the piece I now offer to the public, will meet with but an unfavourable reception, as it opposes the current of their inclinations, and condemns their favourite amusements. Conscience, however, forces me to speak, and endeavour to stem the torrent of corruption, by a feeble, but well meant opposition.

That the theatre is one of the chief sources of that immorality which prevails so generally in this nation, and which will, I fear, bring down a curse upon it, is a truth so evident,

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that

that no considerate person will dispute it: and I doubt not but I shall, in the following pages, convince the most unthinking and superficial, that it cannot so much as be called in question. Certain it is, that the stage has, in all ages and nations, contributed greatly to promote vice, though the partizans of theatrical representations assert, that they are intended to reform the manners of mankind; and, by exposing folly and vice in feigned characters, make those who know themselves guilty, endeavour to correct those qualities, which are shewn to have a tendency to render them odious and contemptible. Now, though it may well be disputed, whether exhibiting vice to public view, is a method well calculated to make men take a distaste to it, I think it can admit of no dispute, that dramatic authors have perverted the theatre, and done their utmost to increase the temptation to vice, by shewing it in an amiable light. In this they follow the prince of darkness, whose ministers they become by their conduct, as that subtle and seducing spirit entices men to sin, by veiling the deformity of vice, and making sin appear to their fascinated eyes under a form both specious and alluring: for as Plato has said of virtue, "that if it was to appear in its native beauty to mankind, its charms would, with irresistible force, captivate all hearts," so it may,

may, with equal truth, be said of vice, that were it to appear in its own hideous form, those who are now its most abject slaves, would start from it with horror.

What then must we think of men, who make it their whole business to draw in deluded mortals to the commission of sin, by disguising it under all the allurements which a wanton and luxuriant imagination can suggest! May they not be considered as demons in a human shape, as the pests and common enemies of mankind? Those, surely, who debauch their fellow creatures are their worst enemies, and must be deemed, by the wise, greater pests of society than murderers, or highway robbers; for what are life and property, if weighed in a balance with eternal salvation? or what is the guilt of those, who destroy the body only, when compared with the heinousness of their guilt, who tempt us to incur the wrath of him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell?

It is, doubtless, owing to this circumstance, of players being instrumental in promoting vice, that the profession of an actor has been considered as infamous in all ages and nations. In Greece, where the theatre, and most of those refined arts which owe their existence to original

sin, and are proofs of the degeneracy, not of the improvement, of the human species; in Greece, whose inhabitants carried their infatuation for theatrical representations to the same absurd excess that our countrymen do at present, the profession of a player was looked upon as infamous; though, by an inconsistency frequent among mortals, players were, among the Greeks, sometimes invested with the first honours and dignities of the commonwealth. However, that the profession of a player was considered as scandalous, appears evidently from a passage in the celebrated oration of Demosthenes concerning the crown; that renowned orator, in drawing a parallel between himself and Eschines his rival, in order to shew how much he had the advantage of him, tells him, "You," says he, "were a player; I was an auditor: you acted your part ill; I hissed you." The profession of a player might, indeed, be justly considered as scandalous, if nothing could be objected to it, but the dishonesty and dissimulation of assuming a feigned character, and uttering sentiments to which the heart is a stranger. It was owing to this, that the learned and pious professor Rollin, when a scholar at the Jesuits college, could never be prevailed upon to act a part in one of their plays; finding, in his modest and ingenuous nature, a repugnancy to personating

sonating a borrowed character, which he justly looked upon as a species of deceit. One of the legislators of the Greeks considered the writing and acting of plays in the same light: when Eschylus, whose pieces are, with respect to morality, greatly superior to the moderns, particularly to those of the English, had acted with general applause in a tragedy of his own composing, (for the professions of player and dramatic poet were, at that time, considered as much the same, as indeed they are in effect) the legislator abovementioned sent for him, and, in a transport of passion, asked him, “ what he meant by telling so many lies?” to this the poet answered, that there was no real intention to deceive; and that the whole audience knew that the play was a fiction, and that nothing was said upon the stage in earnest, but merely for their amusement. The legislator hereupon replied, “ By using ourselves thus to tell lies for our “ amusement, we may at last come to tell them “ in good earnest.” Such was the detestation in which this ancient sage held even the most innocent of dramatic representations: for tragedies may be indeed considered as the most innocent, or rather the least pernicious works of this nature.

Of all the French tragedies, which are mostly wrote upon the model of the ancients, and are much more chaste and moral than those exhibited upon our stage, there is but one, which, in the opinion of that famous prelate, Mons. Bossuet, may be read without danger; and that is, the Penelope of the Abbe Genet. The reason which he assigns for this is, that all the others are wrote in such a manner as to inflame the passions. The same objection may much more justly be made to the tragedies represented upon the English stage; the reading or seeing them is highly dangerous, as passion is carried to the greatest lengths, and the practice of suicide, the greatest of all crimes, encouraged, by the frequent examples of it which they exhibit; representing it as the natural effect of heroism and magnanimity. Even the tragedy of Cato, the most unexceptionable of all the English dramatic pieces, is not exempt from this defect. But our tragedies are liable to much stronger objections; and I shall now make it appear, by many examples taken from some of the most popular, that they abound with the most flagrant instances of immorality, and are calculated to banish all principle from the minds of the young and unexperienced; to shake the foundations of morality, and introduce the most dangerous scepticism.

In the tragedy of Hamlet, the hero of the piece is represented as having formed a resolution to revenge the murder of his father, by killing his uncle; contrary to the dictates of religion, which expressly forbids the revenging of one crime, by the commission of another; and, what still aggravates the guilt of this resolution, the prince is represented as having taken it by the suggestion of a spirit sent from the other world to excite him to the murder. In this the poet has followed the example of Sophocles, in whose tragedy of Electra, Orestes revenges the murder of his father Agamemnon, by killing his mother Clytemnestra, and her gallant Egisthus.—What a shame is it for a christian poet to inculcate notions of morality, as gross and erroneous as those of the pagans? and what a scandal to a christian country is it, that such pieces should be not only represented in it, but applauded?

In the tragedy of Venice Preserved, the horrid and barbarous design to set fire to a city, and massacre all the inhabitants, is represented as glorious and heroic; and the villains who are engaged in so black an undertaking are held up as models of virtue by the poet; who exerts all his art to excite the compassion of the audience in their favour, instead of making them appear as objects of detestation and abhorrence. The
author

author of this piece, who appears to have been a compleat libertine in principle, has, by several particular passages, shewn himself to be the sworn foe of all decency and order. The licentiousness with which he abuses the clergy, cannot but excite the indignation of every one, that is not totally lost to all sense of religion:

Would you think it?

*Renault, that old, wither'd, winter rogue,
Loves simple fornication like a priest."*

The Orphan, wrote by the same author, is a piece still more exceptionable. The indecency of the scene, in which Polydore is represented as giving three soft knocks at the chamber door of Monimia, in order to be admitted to her bed, in the place of his brother Castalio, as well as some of the scenes that follow it, is too flagrant to be insisted on. I pass by Chamont's unworthy treatment of the chaplain, which is manifestly intended to bring the whole body of the clergy into contempt, as the learned and ingenious Mr. Collier has sufficiently enlarged upon it, in his *Short View of the Stage*; a book I would earnestly recommend to the perusal of all serious christians.

Nothing

Nothing can, for obscenity, exceed that scene in the tragedy of the Fair Penitent, in which Lothario relates to Rossano the manner in which he triumphed over the virtue of Calista. It seems surprising that any modest woman can hear, without confusion, such expressions as these :

*I found the fond, believing, love-sick maid,
Loose, unattir'd, warm, tender, full of wishes;
Fierceness and pride, the guardians of her honour,
Were lull'd to rest, and love alone lay waking :
I snatch'd the glorious, golden opportunity,
And with prevailing youthful ardour prest her ;
Till with short sighs, and murmuring reluctance,
The yielding fair one gave me perfect happiness :
Even all the live-long night we pass'd in bliss,
In extasies too fierce to last for ever.
At length the morn, and cold indifference came,
When fully sated with the luscious banquet,
I hastily took leave, and left the nymph
To think on what was past, and sigh alone.*

The piece from which these lines are taken, ends with Calista's laying violent hands on herself ; and every woman that deviates from the paths of virtue, is, by her example, encouraged to

atone for a breach of chastity by suicide — a much more enormous crime. Pride might naturally excite them to such a desperate resolution; and that false shame is capable of making women perpetrate the most horrid actions, appears from the numerous examples of prostitutes who have made away with themselves, and of unnatural mothers, who have destroyed their illegitimate offspring.

In the tragedy of *Jane Shore*, that prostitute is represented as apologizing for her ill conduct, in terms which seem calculated to encourage women to vice; and which I have often heard quoted by young ladies, with an approbation which shews how much they favour the natural depravity of their minds, and confirms the truth of that maxim of the poet,

That every woman's in her heart a rake.

The lines in question are as follow,

*Such is the measure hapless women find,
And such the curse entail'd upon our kind,
That man, the lawless libertine, may rove;
Free and unquestion'd thro' the wilds of love:*

But

*But if a woman, sense and nature's fool,
 If poor weak woman swerve from virtue's rule,
 If, strongly charm'd, she leave the thorny way,
 And in the flow'ry paths of pleasure stray,
 Ruin ensues, reproach and endless shame,
 And one false step entirely damns her fame;
 In vain with tears she may the loss deplore,
 In vain look back to what she was before,
 She sets, like stars that fall, to rise no more.* }

This sentiment is indeed natural in a prostitute, but by no means so in a penitent; for Jane Shore seems to regret her past guilty pleasures, and endeavours to palliate the vices of her sex.

From this, and many other passages, it evidently appears, that dramatic poets take every opportunity to apologize for vice. But this will appear in a stronger light, when I come to speak of the comic writers, who have, in all ages and nations, been its avowed partizans.

Some of the most eminent comic writers have acknowledged, that the whole scope and design of comedy is to amuse, not to edify. If we look into some of the most celebrated

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productions

productions of the comic authors, who flourished in the reign of king Charles the second, and queen Anne, we shall find this truth sadly verified. Dryden, in his comedy of the Wild Gallant, has introduced a bawdy-house upon the stage; and the immorality of his comic pieces has fully justified the censure of bishop Burnet, who calls him, "a monster of all sorts of impurities."

The Relapse, of Sir John Vanbrugh, which he, with the most blasphemous impudence, says, "any lady might lay by her prayer-book without disparagement," is replete with a profaneness, which must make every serious christian shudder. I shall only quote the following passage: Worthy, after having exerted all his eloquence to seduce Amanda, the wife of his friend, concludes his infamous discourse with an expression, which I cannot quote without trembling,

Despise your God, since he neglects his angel.

Such daring impiety should render the works of this author detestable. This is not the only instance of this author's breaking thro' all the bounds of decency; he has attacked the

the church with the utmost virulence, in the character which he has given of a chaplain in the same play; and, as if that was not enough, has made Sir John Brute, in the Provok'd Wife, assume the habit of a clergyman.

But Vanbrugh is not single in thus profanely treating the clergy, (a set of men, who, being chosen by God himself to promulgate the precepts of his holy religion, are entitled to greater respect than any other collective body of men whatever, as not being of human, but divine appointment) Congreve has, in the Old Batchelor, vilely traduced the order, by drawing the character of Spintext; and has represented the debauched Belmour, as disguising himself in this habit, in order to carry on an infamous intrigue.

With what view have these two authors made their debauchees have recourse to the ecclesiastical habit, to fulfill their wicked purposes? Why, doubtless, to bring an odium upon the cloth, and make the ignorant believe, that it often serves to cloak the most flagrant immoralities.——But even bodily defects, which should be considered with compassion,

passion, as miserable proofs of our frail and perishable nature, are made heinous crimes in the clergy. The author of the *Old Batchelor* has availed himself of Spintext's one eye, and a black patch, in order to vilify the sacerdotal character : and this bad example has been since followed by the profane author of the *Minor* ; the chief humour of which piece consists in giving the opprobrious name of *Dr. Squintum* to a clergyman of reputation, who has been since more maliciously abused, under the same appellation, in an abominable farce, called, *The Methodist* ; which is, indeed, a proper sequel to such a first part.

Maskwell, in the *Double Dealer*, borrows a gown from the chaplain as a disguise, which he intended to make use of, in order to put his treacherous designs in execution ; and he, at the same time, tells us, “ that no plot, either public or private, can succeed, without some churchman has a hand in it.” The chaplain, in the *Relapse*, at the instigation of the nurse, and upon the promise of a living, advises miss to marry against her conscience. In fine, many more instances might be produced to prove that the English dramatic writers have made it their chief endeavour to render the clergy

clergy contemptible; and this has been the practice, in all ages, of the stage. Shakespear has, with this view, introduced the character of Sir Hugh Evans, a Welch parson; and Ben Johnson, in the *Alchymist*, as well as in *Bartholomew Fair*, has made the clergy in general ridiculous, by exposing, with the utmost malice, the contortions, and tones of voice, which have rendered those called Fanatics, obnoxious to the scoffs of the profane.

From all these examples, and many more that might be produced, it appears evidently, that dramatic writers are the sworn enemies of the church; the clergy are considered by them as foes, against whom their united forces should be levelled. And this, indeed, is not to be wondered at; for whilst clergymen are exerting their utmost endeavours to inculcate the principles of morality; they, on the other hand, preach up vice with the most diabolical zeal, and do their utmost to poison the minds of the people, and to render them wicked upon principle—a degree of depravity not to be found amongst the felons in Newgate.

That to encourage immorality is the chief aim of comic writers, will fully appear from the

the instances which I shall now produce from their pieces; and I doubt not but that when I shall have laid them before the reader, he will not wonder that they should be sworn enemies to the clergy, on account of the opposition of their tenets.—Disobedience to parents seems to be inculcated as a virtue by the comic authors, as, in most of their pieces, young women marry libertines against the consent of their parents and guardians, whose characters are always represented in the most ridiculous and disadvantageous light. “Honour thy father and thy mother,” is the first commandment that young persons are encouraged to violate, by frequenting the theatre. Thus, in the *Bold Stroke for a Wife*, the hero of the play outwits the four guardians of his mistress; and, as he comes off triumphant, such actions are, by his success, encouraged as laudable and praise-worthy. But this is not the only objection that may be made to this piece. What a shocking farce is made of religion, in those scenes wherein the quakers are introduced preaching upon the stage? To pass by the horrid indecency of that expression in Fainall’s mock sermon, “I feel a longing desire for more delicious meat,” is not the whole calculated to put the christian religion in the lowest and most abject light?

In the Suspicious Husband, a young lady, supposed to be of character, disguises herself in mens cloaths, in order to run away with her gallant; and her disobedience is enhanced, by the effrontery with which she quits the habit of her sex. These disguises are, indeed, highly indecent; and yet almost every English comedy affords an instance of the kind. Ranger, the hero of the play, is a consummate rake; and yet the author, by blending some good qualities in his character, and representing him as a man that adheres inviolably to the dictates of honour, has rendered it more dangerous, than that of a person totally void of principle. Indeed, the notion of honour has been, in all ages, highly prejudicial to religion, and seems to be little better than vice under the mask of virtue, as no true honour can subsist independent of religion.

But no crime is more strongly recommended by the comic authors, than the sin of adultery; insomuch that they seem, in opposition to the decalogue, to have given a new commandment of their own, viz. "Thou shalt commit adultery." The cuckolding an alderman is a standing text in most of their pieces. Alderman Fondlewife is, in the Old

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Batchelor,

Batchelor, made a cuckold by Belmour, who, as has been observed before, assumes the habit of a clergyman, in order to effect his purposes, and carries with him, as a prayer-book, a collection of obscene novels, which opens at the Innocent Adultery. In the Double Dealer, almost every character introduced, is a cuckold, or cuckold-maker.

What has been said may suffice to shew, that the comedy amongst the moderns in the school of vice and impurity; amongst the ancients it was full as bad. The obscenities of Plautus and Aristophanes are so shocking, that I shall not cite them in a book calculated for christian readers. And though Terence is by many looked upon as a moral, his works are, in my opinion, very improper to be put into the hands of youth. In the plots of all his plays there is a visible fameness, and fornication is the foundation of them all.

The ancients, though destitute of the light of the gospel, were sensible of the pernicious effects of such immoral pieces; and their opinion of the theatre will fully appear from what I am going to lay before the reader.

In this place, it may not be amiss to take notice, that the stage is of pagan original, invented for the honour and worship of demons. There were, amongst the Romans, several sorts of games and plays consecrated to their idols. The first, were those which they called the Circensian, Floral, Cereal, Apollinar, and Capitoline. These plays made a vital part of their religion: an actor was a kind of priest; the theatre, a temple.

We are informed by Valerius Maximus, that one Valesius, a rich Roman, being ill of the plague, was, by the direction of an evil spirit, cured of it, by washing in hot water, taken from the altar of Proserpina; in acknowledgment of which, the spirit ordered his patient to institute certain plays to him. And Dionysius Halicarnassensis says, that, in a time of great mortality, the devil appeared to one T. Latinus, in the shape of Jupiter Capitolinus, commanding him to tell the citizens, that this judgment was owing to their neglect of the plays; whereupon they were renewed with greater pomp, and the plague ceased: *Latine, die civibus mibi ludi præsultatorem displicuisse, qui nisi magnificè instaurentur periculum urbi fore.*

The stage may, indeed, still pass for a temple, since it is often more crowded than the church, and its performances received with greater gust than those of the pulpit.— If a timely check be not given to it, it will, I am afraid, in time, reduce us to a necessity of building theatres faster than churches, as they are already more magnificent than those sacred edifices.

The next Roman diversions that I shall take notice of, are those which took in the common stage-players, by way of comedy and tragedy. These scenic diversions were unknown at Rome, while the Roman virtue retained its pristine vigour, and were not seen there, till three hundred and eighty-nine years after its building, when appeared certain Morris dancers, or buffoons, who, by their frightful figures, gesticulations, and other anticks, attempted to divert the people.

Tragedy, a dramatic performance, wherein the actions of heroes are represented, was at first only a devotional hymn, sung by the pagans in honour of Bacchus, the god of wine, who was adored by most nations, the Scythians only excepted. These, though barbarians,

barians, thought it absurd to worship as a god, one that deprived people of their reason, and made them either fools or madmen. This species of poetry took its rise as follows: Icarius, who reigned in Attica, A. M. 2700, having taken a he-goat that had ravaged his vineyard, sacrificed it to Bacchus. During the ceremony, the people danced about the altar, singing the praises of that god; which practice was annually observed, and called trigody, a vintage song; and afterwards tragedy, which we pronounce tragedy, from *τραγος*, a goat, and *ωδη*, a song; so that the word tragedy signifies a goat-song.—The play-house still smells rank of that wanton animal, according to the doctrine of Salvian, who says, that in the representation of fornication, the whole body of the people are mental fornicators; and they who, perhaps, came innocent to the play, return adulterers from the theatres: *Omnis omnino plebs fornicatur, adulteri revertuntur.*—De gubernatione Dei.

Horace ascribes the invention of tragedy to Thespis, who brought forth his actors in a cart, where they rehearsed their poems, their faces being daubed with dregs of wine; or, according to Suidas, painted with ceruse and vermilion,

vermilion, in allusion to the satyrs, who are represented with ruddy visages :

*Ignotum Tragicæ genus invenisse Camenæ
Dicitur et plaustriis vexisse poemata Thespis.*

HOR:

But the refinement of the stage is attributed to Eschylus, who introduced vizards, appointed two actors for the episodes, invented habits suiting the persons they represented; as also the cothurni; or buskins, to heighten their stature, that they might appear like heroes. Sophocles, a Greek poet, added much to the perfection of tragedy, and painted the scene with decorations, according to the nature of the subjects that were to be represented.

I proceed to comedy, which is a playhouse performance, wherein the common accidents of human life are represented. These comic plays were at first no more than a kind of hymn the pagans sung to Bacchus, dancing about the altar, on which they sacrificed a he-goat to him. Athenæus.—It received the name of comedy, when the Athenians made use of this ceremony in their city, and added the chorus of music with figure-dancers. It

was properly called a village song, from the Greek word *κωμη*, a village, and *ωδη*, a song, or hymn, of which the popish wake-songs are imitations. We are informed by Plato, that the commemoration of their demons were celebrated with hymns. Thus the Greeks, who are supposed to be the first inventors of them, had their solemn hymns, called *κλητους υμνους*, which they sung to their propitious demons. The Romans had also their *assamenta*, or peculiar hymns sung to some particular deity, as their *Janualia*, *Junonia*, and *Saturnalia*.—The songs sung by the roman catholics on their holidays, in honour of their canonized saints, are manifest copies of these pagan hymns.

That the pagan plays were part of those solemnities they performed to their demons, which were in reality devils, appears from a passage of St. Austin, who proves from Varro, that they were never celebrated, except in honour of the gods. *De civitate Dei, Lib. viii. cap. 26.*

From what has been said, it must be acknowledged that theatrical diversions are of a pagan original, and made a part of the pagan devotions.

devotions.—Christian virtue must, doubtless, have been at a low ebb, when such entertainments were exhibited in contempt of the true God, as had been instituted by the heathens in honour of their fictitious deities.—And it is proper to observe, that the scriptures expressly forbid us to imitate the customs and usages of the heathens, *Jer. x. 3.* “Thus saith the Lord, learn not the way of the heathen, for the customs of the people are vain.”—This is not all; the very naming of heathen gods, unless by way of abhorrence, is forbidden, *Exod. xxiii. 13.* “Make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.”—It follows then, that those who frequent the playhouse, and hear the theatre resound with the names of other gods, defy the precepts and prohibitions of their God, and are enemies to christianity, inasmuch as they dare to encourage those plays, that are not only some of the vain practices of the heathens, but monuments of their idolatry, as they were sacrifices to the devil.

The observation of pagan customs is condemned by the primitive church, as well as by the scriptures.—The synod held at Constantinople, A. D. 683, orders all those to be excommunicated,

excommunicated, who did not renounce heathen customs and practices. *Ethnica institut.* Caranz. Can. 6. and by another canon, those who studied the civil law, were not to use heathenish customs, or go to the theatre, nor wear the scenical habit of the stage.—Tertullian censured it in a christian soldier, for wearing a laurel crown in his triumph, because it was of an idolatrous and infernal original, and worn by those who had devoted themselves to hell.—Christians are, by the council of Africa, forbidden to make sports and feasts upon birth-days, because they were originally instituted by the gentiles.—The fathers looked upon it as sinful to observe any relics of paganism, and therefore solemnly renounced them; and one of the bishops of the church calls the playhouse “the church of the devil, and plays his pomps.” *Tertull. de Spectac.*

How sad is it to see the christian stage crowded with pagan gods, whose names should not be so much as pronounced without indignation, and the Supreme Being sometimes reviled, through the ill language that is given to these heathen numens!—This gave occasion to that warm exclamation of Clemens Alexandrianus against the gentiles, “Oh impiety!

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piety!

piety! you have made the theatre heaven; you have made God himself an actor; that which is holy, you have derided in the persons of devils, οἱμοὶ τῆς αἰσχροσύνης, *Adn. ad Gentes*, p. 39.—The third council of Carthage forbids Christians to attend the stage, because the actors are blasphemers. See *Salv. et Chrysostom.*

Though God forbids us to invoke idols, yet, in contempt of the sacred oracles, the actors implore the aid of Jove, Juno, Apollo, Bacchus, Minerva; and swear by Jove, Mars, and Venus.—Thus, in the play of King Lear, the king cries out, “By Jupiter, I swear, No;” to which Kent answers, “By Juno, I swear, Aye.” In the same play, Lear swears by the sacred Sun, and solemn Night.—The practice of our actors herein is a direct imitation of the heathens, who supplicated their departed heroes as gods, in a sporting manner, especially in their poems and interludes, See *Athanasius contra gentes.*

Xenophon, who lived in the hundred and fifth olympiad, praises the Persians for not suffering their youth to hear comedies.—Marcus Tullius Cicero has inveighed against plays,

plays, as the plague of society; and in particular against comedies, that subsisted only by lewdness.—Morality must certainly suffer by actors, who make love and lewdness, deities; he therefore advises the Romans to abandon them, lest they should be corrupted, as the Grecians were, to their ruin. He censures Trabea and Cecilius, two comic poets, for magnifying love adventures, making Cupid a god, and dwelling too much upon the satisfaction of sense. With regard to tragedy, he says, that it had, in many instances, baffled the force of virtue.

Livy, the historian, says, “ That plays were brought in upon the score of religion; but that the remedy proved worse than the disease; for the plays did more hurt to the mind, than the pestilence to the body.”

Seneca, who died in the 12th year of Nero's reign, complains, that the Roman youth were generally corrupted by the encouragement which that vicious prince gave to the stage. “ In stage plays, says that excellent philosopher, vice finds an easy passage to the heart; and the playhouse is the high road to the brothel house.” He therefore advises

Lucilius to avoid all plays, and laments the frequent concourse of the Roman youth to them. Socrates, who was declared by the oracle, to be the wisest of men, looked upon stage-plays not only as lying, unprofitable diversions, but unbecoming and pernicious pastimes; which caused Aristophanes, a Greek comedian, to traduce him upon the stage; his invectives against him appear in his comedy of *The Clouds*.

Ovid, the most wanton of poets, informs Augustus, that playhouses are the nurseries of all vice, the congress of adulteries, and he therefore advises him to demolish them. In his poem on the *Art of Love*, he tells his lecherous associates, "that the playhouses were the best fairs for unchaste bargains; the most commodious haunts for amorous fellows, and only places for pandars and whores."—He then adds, that it was impossible for parents or husbands to keep their children and wives chaste, while so many playhouses were suffered in the city.—Propertius, an obscene poet, exclaims against the theatres as the instruments of his ruin. *Onimis exitio nata theatra meo!* Solon, one of the wise men of Greece, condemns stage-plays as evils not to be suffered in
a city.

a city.—L. Plinius Secundus, in his panegyric upon Trajan, stiles plays effeminate arts, and altogether unbecoming men, and praises the emperor for banishing them out of the Roman empire, whose honour they had sullied, and whose virtue they had corrupted.

The compositions of several of the old dramatists abounded with amours and wanton intrigues, and the froth of an exuberant wit, and substract these out of most of the English plays, and there will remain nothing but an empty theatre, and a forsaken hive. Kick off vice from the stage, and let nothing be represented but virtue and its attractives, and there is an end of the playhouse.

These examples may suffice to shew what opinion such of the ancients, as had some sense of virtue left, entertained of the stage.—It owed its first rise to idolatrous worship; and I shall now make it appear it owed its renewal to blasphemy and profanation,

The subjects of plays, upon the revival of the theatre, were taken from scripture. The comedy of *The Passion*, was often acted in that age. One of the players narrowly escaped hanging

hanging himself, by acting the part of Judas; and all the mysteries of the christian religion were made the subjects of these profane pieces. This example has been followed by Dryden, who, in his *Fall of Man*, has introduced Christ himself as one of the dramatis personæ.—Theatrical exhibitions have often contributed to the downfall of kingdoms; and, where they are much encouraged, a total depravity of manners is unavoidable.

As I have sufficiently shewn how pernicious an institution the theatre is, by some passages taken from the pieces represented on it, and have made it appear that the wisest of the ancients held it in the highest abhorrence, as well as many of the religious and pious moderns, I shall add nothing more upon that head, but refer the reader for farther information to the learned John James Rousseau's treatise on the effects of dramatic representations upon the minds of men. I shall now proceed to make it evident to persons of the meanest capacity, by arguments which may be easily comprehended by all, that stage-plays have a natural tendency to debauch those that are conversant with them. This I shall make appear, by giving a concise account of the
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lives of some eminent performers, both upon our own and foreign theatres; and I doubt not but the disorders which persons of that profession are guilty of, will fully convince my readers, that the theatre is a constant source of depravity and vice.

Monf. Le Sage, in his *Gil Blas*, represents the men players as coxcombs, that boast of favours received from ladies of quality, and the women as so many abandoned prostitutes, that sell their favours to the highest bidders.—He represents both the actors and actresses as devoted to pride, vanity, debauchery, slander, and every vice. Nay, he goes so far as to make Don Raphael say, that his mother, a celebrated actress, who had been accustomed to play cruel characters in tragedy, would have informed against him in Barbary for thwarting her in an amour, and have stood by to see him burned, with the utmost unconcern and composure. Such was the opinion of Le Sage concerning players, and the effects of dramatic representations upon the minds of men; and yet Le Sage was by no means prejudiced against the stage, for he wrote a comedy called *Turcaret*, and his son was a celebrated player at Paris, where he went by the

the name of *Momineé*. Abandoned as the character of players given by *Le Sage* is, it will appear, from the particulars I am going to relate, that there is no exaggeration in it. *Moliere*, who was both a player and a dramatic writer, is said to have been tainted with the most abominable of all vices. We are informed by an author who published anecdotes of his life, that there was a commerce between him and *Baron* the player, not fit to be named. This shocking vice is common among the French figure-dancers and the Italian singers; and this, if there were no other, would be a sufficient reason to banish them from the kingdom.

I shall not dwell any longer upon so odious a subject: it is a subject whose turpitude preserves it from censure; and glad I am to say, that the players of our own country, notwithstanding all their horrid debaucheries, cannot justly be reproached with any thing of this kind. I shall not say much more concerning the foreign players, as our own will furnish me abundantly with matter. I shall content myself with observing, that there is not a more debauched set of people in the world, than the French and Italian players at Paris,
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and the singers of the French opera. The women players belonging to the Italian comedy, go to mass in order to pick up gallants, and make assignations. The women that dance in the chorusses both at the Italian comedy and opera, receive a salary of only four hundred livres a year, which sum being scarcely sufficient to keep them in shoes, they commence actresses, merely with a view of becoming noted in their profession of a courtesan.

All these instances of immorality have made the Gallican church stigmatize plays and players in a very extraordinary manner. The host is never carried by the opera-house; and all the actors or actresses of the French companies are denied access to the sacrament, and buried in a dunghill, if they die without renouncing the stage. Every body knows, that it was with much difficulty that Louis the fourteenth himself prevailed upon the archbishop of Paris to suffer even Moliere to be buried in consecrated ground; which made his wife utter that blasphemous exclamation, "What, do they refuse a tomb to a man, in whose honour they should erect altars!"

Players, indeed, are but little solicitous about being excommunicated, or not buried in christian burial, as irreligion is a distinguishing characteristic of the profession.—A remarkable instance of this was the answer of Pouisson, a celebrated player of droll parts, who, being on his death-bed, to which he had brought himself by drinking to excess for many years, when asked by a priest whether he renounced the stage, replied, “That he renounced it, upon condition that he was to die.”—So hardened was the wretch, that he made a jest of death even in his last moments.

Atheism and irreligion are common amongst the players upon our stages; and though they are suffered to approach the sacred table, they are seldom seen at it. A certain low comedian, who was a downright atheist, entered a church, and drank a chalice of consecrated wine, by which action he no, doubt, drank his own damnation; and yet this horrid profanation is told of him by players of the same stamp, as a deed worthy to be recorded. Every one knows that a late celebrated comedian sold his wife for a sum of money; and this action alone, would be sufficient to render his name

name eternally infamous, even if it had been free from the many frauds and debaucheries which he was universally known to have been guilty of.

One of the most celebrated comedians of the last age is said to have been obliged to fly to Ireland, for fear of being prosecuted for a robbery.—The debauching of the daughters of reputable citizens was the favourite pursuit of a certain player, who, not long since, quitted London.—What can be more diabolical, than, for the sake of a momentary pleasure, to destroy innocence, entail ruin upon a weak woman, and brand an honest family with infamy? Yet many of the players take a pride in this.—They seem, for the most part, to take Congreve's *Mirabell*, and *Vainlove*, for their models, and to make perfidy and falsehood their study.

When a company of strolling players enter a country town, all fathers and husbands should look well to their wives and daughters, as it is a rule with many of them, to delude as many unthinking girls as they can. The effrontery with which some carry on an intrigue is such, that many debauchees would be shocked at it.

A certain player, whose name I shall suppress, lest what I write with a moral view should be construed into a libel upon a particular person, having taken a liking to a lady whom he had accidentally seen in company, enquired where she lived; and, having received information, went to her house. She was astonished at his visiting her, as she had never been in his company but once before. She therefore asked him, with some surprise, why he intruded upon her in that manner? To which he, with the most unparalleled impudence, answered, "That he came to lie with her." The lady at first expressed great indignation at this abruptness; but the player continuing in the same strain, she at last began to think him agreeably impudent, and the scene at length concluded like that between the libertine Lothario and Calista.

Wilkes, cotemporary with Cibber, debauched Mrs. Rogers, who was the daughter of a reputable clergyman, famous for his good sermons.—It is not, however, surprising that he should debauch her, notwithstanding her virtuous education, as she was familiarized to vice by acting upon the stage.—A certain player, famous for his mimical skill, lately published

published memoirs of his own life, which shews him to be one of the most dissolute and abandoned of rakes. The stories he tells of the intrigues he had carried on, disguised in a woman's habit, are replete with obscenity, and must shock all those that are not as destitute of modesty as the author.

But the licentiousness of people in this way of life cannot so much as even be called in question, since it appears even from the writings of those of the profession. Does not the life of Colley Cibber, written by himself, shew that players in general are addicted to all sorts of debauchery; and that envy, self-interestedness, detraction and calumny, are common amongst them?—Kynaston, he tells us, was so pretty a youth, that after he had played a woman's character upon the stage, he was frequently taken in a coach by a company of ladies upon a party of pleasure.—What can put the dissoluteness of that age in a stronger light?—Now this dissoluteness, it is well known, was owing in a great measure, if not entirely, to the opening of the theatre at the Restoration.—The same author tells us of an actress who affected always to play virtuous characters, and yet had no less than ten bastards.

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In a word, the stage is a sink of all sorts of vice and impurity; and it will not appear surprising that it is so, if we consider what sort of people go on it. Most of those who commence actors are vicious young men, who have been abandoned by their parents or relations, on account of their misbehaviour or debaucheries; some of them have been spendthrifts, who, having run out their whole fortunes, are at last obliged to turn actors for a subsistence.

With regard to the women players, it is universally known that many of them have been common prostitutes before their appearing on the stage; and that those who are not quite so notorious for their irregular conduct, have had several private intrigues before they commenced actresses.

But lewdness is not the only vice with which players are justly chargeable; common honesty is a thing by no means common with the fraternity; nothing is more frequent with them, when they have run in debt with every body who would give them credit, than to go over to Ireland 'till an act of insolvency passes.

When a certain mimical genius has levied a considerable sum on the town by playing
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some pitiful farce of his own composition, (for such is the folly of the public, that he seldom makes less than two thousands pounds in the summer season) he sets up his chariot, and lives at such a rate, that in three or four months time all his money is spent; and when he finds himself in such a bad situation, he sits down, writes another farce as despicable as the former, which enables him to live in the same splendor again.

It is, indeed, a scandal to the nation, and must make us appear contemptible to foreigners, that players should receive a salary more considerable than that of some of those who hold honourable and important places under the government.—It must to them appear almost incredible, that in England a player should have an income of three thousand pounds a year, an equipage, a house in town, and a superb villa in the country. They would, doubtless, be surpris'd to hear, that no player of eminence has less than eight hundred or a thousand a year.—All this would appear extraordinary to that voluptuous and dissolute people the French, as a first-rate player among them has not more than three hundred pounds per annum.

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But if the above instances of the extraordinary favour shewn by the English to players would surprise foreigners, what must they think, were they to hear that Mrs. Oldfield, an actress, was buried in Westminster-Abbey, amongst the kings, heroes, and worthies of Great-Britain. The French, notwithstanding their natural levity, and strong attachment to all sorts of pleasures, are so far from burying an actress at St. Denys, that La Chamlée, one of their most celebrated performers, was thrown upon a dunghill after her death.

I have only touched upon a few particulars of the debauched and dissolute lives of theatrical performers: were I to give a full account of them, it would require a volume. I shall therefore say no more, but conclude with seriously exhorting all my readers to shun all stage plays, as the most fertile sources of temptation.

What need I farther add, to dissuade christians from frequenting the playhouse? Is it not evident, that the writers of plays, and the actors who perform them, are ministers of Satan, since they are not only dissolute themselves, but contribute to spread the contagion
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of vice and debauchery wherever they go.—
 “ By their fruits you shall know them.”—As
 their documents tend to make men more vici-
 ous than they really are; and not to reform
 them, it follows, that they are the seducers of
 mankind, and the delegates of Satan.

If, indeed, plays were of such a nature as
 to do neither good nor harm, they might be
 overlooked, as things of an indifferent nature:
 but as they are calculated to subvert all mora-
 lity, and substitute confusion in the place of
 order, they should be banished out of every
 well regulated state.—It is justly observed by
 the wise man, “ that sin is the destruction of
 any people.” It is, therefore, incumbent on
 the legislature to banish all theatrical represen-
 tations out the kingdom, as the first step to-
 wards a reformation of manners.

I am not ignorant that what I have said will
 make many brand me with the names of bigot
 and enthusiast; but as I have acquitted my
 conscience, by freely communicating my senti-
 ments, for the good of my fellow subjects,
 such censures can never give me the least
 uneasiness.

P O S T S C R I P T.

THE intention of the author of the preceding pages, is, to shew the theatre in its proper light ; namely, as one of the grand sources of that depravity of manners, which is too visible amongst persons of all ranks. He has exerted himself to the utmost, to support all his arguments by examples, as abstract reasonings have but little effect, when they are not properly corroborated by collateral proofs. In this he has followed the example of Mr. Collier, who, in his *Short View of the Stage*, has, by citing a variety of passages from the dramatic poets of the age, proved the tendency of the stage to corrupt the manners of the people.

As the play-writers of this age have trod in the steps of their predecessors, the present author was of opinion, that a work of the same nature as Mr. Collier's was as necessary now, as in the dissolute reign of Charles the Second ; and, if he should be so happy as to open the eyes of the public, and make them see the stage in its true light, as the source of
corruption,

corruption, and the players as the instruments of Satan, and seducers of the people, he will think the pains he has taken in compiling this treatise abundantly compensated.

F I N I S.

corruption, and the players at the instruments
of Satan, and the people, who will
think the same before in comparing this
world to the land of Canaan.

W I W

